

## Of the People, By the People

A democratic society: “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly...”(Merriam Webster). In true democracy, “the people” all have a voice, a voice that includes men and women. Yet, in the U.S. the majority voice of “the people” comes from the minority male 49%. Without the female 51% represented this is not a democracy. This must change. Women must lead; women must have a voice in media, and women must have a voice in law.

In 1787 the U.S. adopted the Constitution to form a democratic society. However, we have yet to form a true democracy. It took 129 years after the Constitution for a female, Jeannette Rankin, to be elected as a representative. Even then, she was elected by a male vote because women were not given suffrage until 1920.

Today the male voice still dominates law and media. The American Bar Association cited that as of 2016, women made up only 36% of the legal workforce. In the media, in 2015, “... men generated 62.1% of news; women generated 37.3%” (Women’s Media Center (WMC)). According to WMC’s 2015 research, the divide is not limited to professional media reporters— women’s opinions are less often used to support information; “In evening broadcast news, men were on camera 68% of the time” (WMC). The media gives us access to information. Lawyers support our rights. These are two fundamental democratic functions.

Wage gaps and gender norms perpetuate the divide between women and men. As long as these exist, we will not live in a true democracy because the

population's voice is skewed. Wage gaps discourage women from entering these fields. Why work just as hard as your male colleague when he is paid like your superior? As of 2015, a woman lawyer earned 89.7% of the male lawyer's dollar (American Bar Association). To promote women in legal roles, we must enforce wage equality.

A more challenging factor to address is society's gender norms. Stereotypes teach girls their sexualized bodies matter more than their opinions. Look no farther than the 2016 presidential election to see this illustrated. As long as girls are told that taking a stand for their opinions makes them *nasty* or *aggressive*, and not *pleasing*, girls will not pursue careers in professional media or law. This dangerous message threatens the health of our society.

This issue cannot be changed easily. However, we can start with education. Providing scholarships for women attending law and journalism school would encourage them to pursue these careers. We must educate girls and boys as equally strong, capable, intelligent leaders, and encourage them to look beyond roles established by society. If we work for wage equality and altering gender roles, then perhaps women will be encouraged to claim their political voice, allowing us to finally achieve a true democratic society.